

DUXBURY RAMBLINGS

By FANNY SEYMOUR FIELD

The first production of the DHS dramatic group reminded me of a first night 18 years ago when "Peg O' My Heart," written for the late Laurette Taylor by her husband, J. Hartley Manners, was performed. Mary Hannigan (Nass) was the "Peg," and my father, William Seymour, was stage director.

As long ago as that, I spent the beautiful fall and winter months away from Duxbury, and of course missed every production of talented DHS boys and girls. But for the last four years I have seen the plays with delight, for I am now a year-round resident.

When I was in my teens, the DYC annual production was the only entertainment given during the summer, except for the vaudeville, set of tableaux or evening of playlets that were put on to make money.

From 1900 until the first World War, members of a Duxbury summer family put on many evening entertainments of one kind or another. There were the Winslows with Aunt Addie Soale; the Maxwells (Helen Abbott is a member of that family now in residence); Mrs. William Potter and her children; Mrs. Joseph C. Courtney, Sidney Stone, Dorothy Coburn, Mr. DeAndrea and Mr. Miller's brother, Mr. Walker. Others were Marie Donald Lloyd, the Sandersons, Mr. and Mrs. William Seymour and their Ned, Fanny, Jim and John; the Simmons brothers, and Oscar J. Devere who did magician's tricks.

There was Harold Kellogg, architect of the new elementary school building, who made scenery and devised splendid lighting effects. Remember there were few electric lights—perhaps none—in the years before World War I. I'm sure Mrs. Jenny Glover would enjoy telling anyone, as she reminded me one recent summer day, of the evening at Mattakesett Hall during a benefit for the Odd Fellows, when an oil lamp was overturned and a dozen or more of us little girls in cheesecloth dresses were herded to the front of the stage and dropped off into waiting arms so we wouldn't catch fire! I think Mrs. Glover was reciting at the time, but don't know who tipped over the lamp!

Remember Louise Wadsworth?

Another time Louise Wadsworth, daughter of Captain Alexander Wadsworth, was posing as "A Widow with her Two Sons" on the stage. But at the evening performance only one "son" appeared, notwithstanding the hand-printed sign stuck up on the easel. And all because my youngest brother was "too afraid" of the footlights. Today brother John is "braving" TV cameras and lights in New York City. Once in a while real actors helped round out the program. In 1904 or 1905, my father and another fine comedian, William Sampson, presented the skit "Two Old Cronies." "Uncle Billy" Sampson was the husband of Mary Webster, one of the "Stone and Webster" daughters.

Needless to say, my Aunt Fanny Davenport came here to her modern (in 1893) mansion only to rest from her stage duties during the short summer holiday. She never appeared before the public in Duxbury, and few residents—summer or winter—knew her at all. She was happy keeping to her broad vine-covered porches and spent many wonderful hours on Duxbury Bay in her cat boat, the Fanny D, so skillfully sailed by her actor-husband, W. Melbourne MacDowell. In 1894-96 he was Commodore of the DYC, then on Standish Shore. There was no Golf Club then. Mrs. MacDowell lived only six summers in the house she built opposite my mother's (May Davenport Seymour) on Washington St. Her house is now owned by Mrs. George Putnam Metcalf.

Entertainment In Old Days

In 1923 I was in charge of a vaudeville program that ran for seven continuous hours beginning at 2 p.m.—all part of the Street Fair on

Russell Road, a benefit for the Children's Hospital. That fall, Dr. Field and I were beginning our 23rd winter at Princeton University, and we left earlier in August than planned, so mother took over for me and directed the ten-act program in Mrs. Miller's barn. Dressed in hoop-skirt and poke-bonnet, she took the 15-cent admission fee at the door.

Three years after my father's serious illness, and his enforced idleness during that time, mother refused to let him go out alone on a road tour directing Miss Helen Hayes in her hit, "To the Ladies" (in which he also played a small part—as toastmaster). Refusing to burden her family with any expense, mother joined the Company as an extra and sat in the last visible seat at the stage-long table, having no lines, but reacting to the speeches and lines of the leading actors. She, who had been ingenue at the Boston Museum and a lead with William Gillette as a girl in her twenties!

What a trouper she was, acting to the last, letting few people know of her almost total deafness. She died in 1927, and from that spring father lived in his beloved home, Clamavi Towers. During the winter he boarded with the Misses Joyce, a little way up the street. He used to write me that he walked almost every day past and around the big white house behind the high hedge to see "that dear place was all safe." In his seven years in Duxbury before his death in 1933, he became friendly with old and young in the town. When his library of non-theatrical books was given his five children, I felt that his friends should share in the pride of owning something of his, so I invited them to "Clamavi" (we bought the estate from my brothers and sister in '35, to browse among the book shelves in the study. I asked them to list a book that each one would like to have as a remembrance. Mrs. Helen Cushing, now Mrs. Ernest Bailey, picked out a dry looking volume of essays, and when I questioned her choice, she said with a smile: "See bits of white paper-markers sticking out of the tops of the pages? Your father used to read bits here and there from this book to my pupils in the Kingston School, and I prize it above every book in this room."

68 Years In Theatre

We never knew he had done this reading, nor did I know all the many new friends he had made while he lived those lonely seven winters. He used to attend Town Meetings and garden club affairs. He was manager of the late Paul Peterson's baseball team, and he directed the DHS plays in delightful, wistful memory of his 68 years in the theatre. For him it was one of the Fine Arts, not a money-making business, although he raised his family and supported his mother from the time he was eight years old from the proceeds of his self-educated life in the theatre. How many readers of the good old Boston Transcript found his well written letters full of information about the stage and its folk on the "Notes and Queries" page? He sent his children copies of all he wrote and this writing could have been made into a veritable history of the Boston and New York stages, and of the notables who acted or directed them in the 19th century. He was of the "old school," and I imagine he did not entirely regret retiring to the peace and joy of Duxbury after the change came to the 20th-century drama, bringing innovations of movies, gongs to indicate the curtain raising instead of soft orchestra music, and revolving stages. Stock companies were on the wane, and

stars were born overnight with little or no apprenticeship or knowledge of the grand figures who had trod the boards years before.

There is wisdom in reading his stories of the actors and theatres of ages gone, and our young Thespians will do well to learn all they can of the theatre and its lore before undertaking the serious business of earning their livelihood. "Enjoy yourselves and realize there is true value in playing a part well no matter how small it may be. For 'all the world's a stage and all the men and women